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ABSTRACT

This booklet explains how local communities can organize and structure their one-stop centers so that business is viewed as a customer of the system. The introduction provides an overview of the booklet's development and purpose. The following key attributes underpinning a workforce investment system that views business as its customer are discussed: market driven; customer focused; skill based; and results oriented. The following strategies for assessing business needs as a first step toward establishing a market-driven system are outlined: (1) partner with business to operate one-stop centers; (2) establish workforce board committees and surveys; (3) establish industry-specific advisory committees; and (4) involve established employer organizations and business coalitions. The remaining sections examine the following items: (1) the key elements of customer-focused one-stop centers (business partnerships; comprehensive employer services; training targeted to identified business needs; business outreach; a professional environment); (2) guidelines for delivering industry-recognized training (identify specific industry trends and skill requirements; set high standards for education and training providers; use national or state skill standards when available; offer employer-based certifications); and (3) strategies for enhancing accountability (set new standards for employer satisfaction and continuous improvement; publicly disclose performance of training providers; assess overall system performance based on specific measurable outcomes). (MN)

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Business Coalition for Workforce Development

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Meeting market demands

New roles for one-stop centers:

serving the business customer

Business Coalition for Workforce Development

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New roles for one-stop centers: **serving the business customer**

The information in this brochure is drawn from a satellite town hall meeting, "New Roles for One-Stop Centers: Serving the Business Customer," hosted by the Center for Workforce Preparation, an affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. The center produced the broadcast and these materials in collaboration with the Business Coalition for Workforce Development.

A panel of experts from across the country provided information about how local communities can organize and structure their one-stop centers so that business is viewed as a customer of the system. Without business in this critical role, workforce systems will find it difficult to satisfy local labor market needs.

This booklet provides the background materials developed for this town hall meeting and distributed to more than 100 communities that viewed the live broadcast. Four important themes were addressed, each designed to highlight how one-stop activities can be aligned with business requirements and respond to regional economic needs.

This booklet has broad application and contains useful information on the factors that contribute to an effective one-stop center. Please use what is provided to help guide discussions in your community about business as customer and how local workforce systems can incorporate this role as a basic element of their systemic planning.

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Service

What's new?
Business as customer!

For decades, the focus of federal "workforce development" has been providing a vast array of programs and services to individuals in need of special assistance in entering the workforce. This maze of resources, typically available through scores of different agencies, became increasingly difficult for potential workers to navigate and harder for the business community to access.

Two years ago, the U.S. Congress passed the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) in an effort to unify these fragmented programs into a new, comprehensive workforce investment system — and to provide universal access for all residents to a core set of employment-enhancing services. The "one-stop center" is the new infrastructure for organizing and delivering services in communities.

Significantly, the federal legislation recognizes business as a primary customer of this public workforce development system. One-stop centers are to be designed by employers for employers, guaranteeing that they become viable community-based resources to help business find and train qualified workers and also to help qualified workers find jobs for which they have the necessary skills and credentials. Under WIA, one-stops are the structure for delivering services to individuals and business.

Business leaders advocated for a new workforce delivery system that would incorporate key business principles, improving responsiveness and establishing training programs that would keep pace with the rapidly changing marketplace. They envisioned a one-stop center system driven by the needs of the dynamic economy, friendly to its business customers, aligned with business skill needs and focused on outcomes, not process. The new system will be:

Market driven: One-stop centers must be shaped by changing employer requirements and benchmarked to employer standards in order to be valued — and used — by the business community. This requires continual assessment of business needs in the community and region and aligning programs and services with those needs.

Customer focused: Employer satisfaction counts. Quality, relevance and responsiveness in programs and services provided at one-stops are important elements to employers. Establishing a business-friendly and customer-focused environment is critical to success.

Skill based: The new currency in the marketplace is skills. One-stop centers, in partnership with training providers, community colleges and other postsecondary partners, can provide training based on industry-recognized standards and offer certifications based on demonstrated competencies.

Results oriented: One-stop centers are required to collect and publicly report performance results and customer satisfaction measures. Employers, workers and job seekers alike will know which programs and training providers are effective — and which are not. This information will provide data for continuous improvements of the delivery system.

These key business principles herald a new era in the delivery of services, potentially altering both the process and the product of public workforce development efforts.

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Needs

Market driven: assessing business needs

The dynamic marketplace is the starting point to define the competitive workplace needs of employers and the escalating skill requirements for workers. To be effective and valuable for the employer community, one-stop centers must align services and training to the skills required in the local economy. Yet this is not an easy task.

Several one-stop centers around the country have been recognized for their exemplary practices in assessing and responding to business needs. Each is unique, yet they share some common effective strategies for assessing changing business needs, such as:

Partnering with business to operate one-stop centers. Single large employers are emerging as "sponsors" of one-stop centers in some areas. A portion of the center may be the simulated work environment of that business, such as a bank, a call center or a distribution facility. Many of the basic academic and "world of work" skills needed by that employer serve as the basis for on-site training, yet may apply to other work settings as well.

Setting up workforce board committees and surveys. Effective workforce boards use a variety of strategies to identify current and projected workplace needs, including subcommittees and advisory groups that meet on an ongoing basis. Focus groups also can be effective in identifying "hot button" community workforce issues. Some boards, often in partnership with other organizations, use employer surveys as an effective tool for gathering data on a broad range of local or regional business needs and workforce trends.

Establishing industry-specific advisory committees. More communities are organizing their education and workforce development agendas around projected industry growth sectors. During the design of one-stop centers, an effective strategy has been forming small groups of employers from specific industries to identify that sector's workforce needs. Often this effort is linked to a trade association or industry-based coalition and may be coordinated with a local or state economic development entity.

Involving established employer organizations and business coalitions. Increasingly, business organizations — chambers of commerce and other business coalitions initially formed to address specific community-based issues such as education reform and transportation — are getting involved in workforce issues. Such business groups provide rich opportunities to gather a broad sampling of business needs.

To keep the workforce system current, one-stop centers must reach into the community and involve a broad cross section of employers on an ongoing basis — beyond individual business members on the workforce board — to provide timely information to form the base of the center's services and training programs.

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Access

Customer focused: providing business-friendly access

Vision: The Workforce Development Center is committed to:

- **a customer friendly environment;**
- **meeting the workforce needs of local employers;**
- **the efficient use of fiscal resources;**
- **providing information through state-of-the-art technology; and**
- **assisting customers to reach their highest economic potential.**

Racine County, WI, One-Stop Center Vision Statement

This vision statement captures the essence of a one-stop center, reflecting the commitment to be customer focused. These features represent best practice in one-stop design:

Business partnerships. Customer-focused one-stop centers involve business as active partners. In some cases, businesses provide staff to connect the center to the employer community.

Comprehensive employer services. Employer services in one-stop centers typically include recruitment assistance, applicant testing, on-site interviewing, seminars on workforce and human resource issues, employer incentives, customized training, financing options, access to labor market information, and other services to address unique local needs.

Training targeted to identified business needs. Training programs for job seekers are developed to address workforce needs that area businesses have identified, often in response to job orders not attracting enough qualified job applicants.

Business outreach. One-stops focused on business as a customer employ a variety of outreach strategies to business, such as assigning employer account representatives, setting up an employer "hot line" or dedicated telephone number, and organizing a single-point-of-contact delivery system, often coordinated with economic development.

Professional environment. Employer-focused centers have an open professional environment, featuring classrooms for skills training and resource rooms for job search, career development, academic improvement and career discovery for youth.

These features capture the spirit and intent of the new legislation — that each community designs user-friendly one-stops that meet its unique employer customer needs. One-stop centers around the country also operate in kiosks, business parks and shopping centers, while others are virtual centers on the Internet.

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Training

Skill based:
delivering industry-recognized training

In the fast-paced global economy, workers who possess strong academic skills that can be applied effectively in the workplace are a company's most valued asset. Yet, with knowledge and skill requirements changing at breakneck speed, employers, employees, educators and students alike struggle to stay in touch with the escalating demands of the workplace and how to translate those requirements into competency-based training. Increasingly, skill standards are becoming that new communication tool.

A skill standard describes the work to be performed, how well the work must be performed and the level of knowledge and skill required to perform that work. Standards are used to communicate to students what is expected by industry and help educators and trainers design curriculum aligned with those expectations. Developed by industry, standards describe employers' technical, academic and "soft" skill needs to educators, trainers and prospective employees.

Skill certificates and certificate programs are proliferating in the marketplace in response to employers' increasing interest in clear explanations and guarantees of what individuals know and can do. Similarly, skill certificates are gaining increased value as an alternative or add-on to academic degrees for individuals to increase and demonstrate marketable competencies.

One-stop centers, in partnership with training providers, community colleges and other postsecondary partners, can take a number of steps to move toward a standards-based system of training and credentials.

→ **Identify specific industry trends and skill requirements.** Establish industry-based committees to advise the one-stop on specific industry trends and skill requirements.

→ **Set high standards for education and training providers.** Make sure that only providers who produce results and meet high standards set by employers are approved or certified by the one-stop.

→ **Use national or state skill standards when available.** Many industry groups and trade associations have developed skill standards, as well as assessment and certification systems. Often they work in partnership with technical schools and community colleges to benchmark training against their standards, with highly effective outcomes.

→ **Offer employer-based certifications.** Businesses highly value training that results in employer-based certification, as evidenced by broad acceptance of certifications in the information technology, health care and financial services sectors.

Results

Outcome oriented:
measuring results and customer satisfaction

One-stop centers must produce results. Three specific strategies within the new legislation are designed to enhance accountability:

- **New standards for employer satisfaction and continuous improvement.** One-stop centers must set up mechanisms to collect information on employer satisfaction and take steps to integrate that feedback into a continuous improvement process. Many one-stops assess why employers are not using a particular service or program, as well as why they are using others.
- **Performance of training providers is disclosed publicly.** Through one-stop centers, the performance records of individual training providers must be made available to the public, including completion rates, placement rates and costs for training, for the benefit of job seekers and employers. There are no presumptive education and training providers in the new workforce system. Only those that meet standards and produce results will be certified to provide services.
- **Overall system performance is based on specific measurable outcomes,** including job placements, retention in jobs, earnings gains and acquired skills. Sanctions are imposed for poor performance.

All of these measures are intended to build credibility with business customers. Business leaders want to see a bold vision tied to a clear plan with measurable results. Measures of accountability need to be stressed, including standards for overall system performance and for the performance of individual training providers.

Employers want a workforce system that produces the right workers with the right skills at the right time. New standards for employer satisfaction and processes for continuous improvement will help training providers meet business requirements for quality, relevance and responsiveness.

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To learn more — start today!

Go to the Business Coalition for Workforce Development Web site at www.workforceinfo.net to access detailed information about state and local contacts, workforce systems in your community, local implementation, and federal policies.

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